



Art, Aesthetics, and the Brain

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Humans have engaged in artistic and aesthetic activities since the appearance of our species. Our ancestors have decorated their bodies, tools, and utensils for over 100,000 years. The expression of meaning using color, line, sound, rhythm, or movement, among other means, constitutes a fundamental aspect of our species' biological and cultural heritage. Art and aesthetics, therefore, contribute to our species identity and distinguish it from its living and extinct relatives.

Science is faced with the challenge of explaining the natural foundations of such a unique trait, and the way cultural processes nurture it into magnificent expressions, historically and ethnically unique. How does the human brain bring about these sorts of behaviors? What neural processes underlie the appreciation of painting, music, and dance? How does training modulate these processes? How are they impaired by brain lesions and neurodegenerative diseases? How did such neural underpinnings evolve? Are humans the only species capable of aesthetic appreciation, or are other species endowed with the rudiments of this capacity?

This volume brings together the work on such questions by leading experts in genetics, psychology, neuroimaging, neuropsychology, art history, and philosophy. It sets the stage for a cognitive neuroscience of art and aesthetics, understood in the broadest possible terms. With sections on visual art, dance, music, neuropsychology, and evolution, the breadth of this volume's scope reflects the richness and variety of topics and methods currently used today by scientists to understand the way our brain endows us with the faculty to produce and appreciate art and aesthetics.

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